

The Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown

A solo performance of my own design

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Abstract

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The Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown is a solo performance of my own design in which a topless, opera-singing, feminist clown embarks on the absurdly impossible journey of finding something appropriate to wear. In creating this theatre piece, I sought to use the artistic tools I have gathered in my three years at the University of Washington School of Drama in order to explore the ways in which women are sexualized and oppressed by what society instructs them to wear. This thesis documents my inspirations behind creating this character and telling this story, my process in developing the piece, and my personal reflections on living as a woman with a body in a man's world. What happens when a woman stops listening to "the Man," or society, and reclaims ownership of her own body?

The Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown

A solo performance of my own design

Alana Cheshire

Bewbs the Clown first introduced herself to me one evening in December 2017 as I was taking a shower and absentmindedly playing the drums on my bare behind. I had one of those moments of stepping outside of myself and observing myself as if I were a stranger. I saw myself, an animal in its natural form, enjoying its nudity in solitude, a female body embracing its own autonomy without an ounce of sexuality imposed on it by an outside force. While I couldn't say that I had observed many other people taking showers alone, I was still willing to bet money that this was a universal human thing - playing drums on one's behind alone in the shower.

How comical the human body is, I thought. How hard we try to mask those comical bits - the dangling, jiggling, flopping bits. Why do we try so hard to hide them? What is the truth about our bodies, and what are just the stories society has told us until we believe them to be true?

I immediately had a vision of a topless clown named Bewbs, and no matter how many times I tried to shake her off, she refused to leave me. We had a solo show class coming up in spring quarter, and I toyed with the idea of bringing her to life then. Ultimately I chickened out, or rather, I realized I wasn't ready for Bewbs yet, and that there were some other aspects of myself that I needed to explore first. Instead, I began a year-long process of gathering information and inspiration.

I have spent the majority of my life feeling as if my body didn't quite belong to me. I was an early bloomer- certainly the first to hit puberty in my grade at elementary school, and all of a sudden it felt as if a harsh white spotlight was following me at all times. I was abused by my brother over a number of years, and didn't feel safe in my own home. My grandfather, ever the

southern gentlemen, asked me on several occasions if I had a 16-inch waist like Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone with the Wind," and my mother began to instruct me to "suck it in" - a rite of passage for a girl, but I was a slender child and didn't really have much to "suck in" to begin with.

These were just the messages I was getting from the people closest to me. Outside of my home, things weren't much clearer. In the 5th grade, I got in trouble for flicking a boy off after he snapped the back of my bra; my teacher then calmly explained to me that the boys were mean to me because they found me attractive (or, in other words, "boys will be boys.") I was taught from an early age that all girls have to be careful with their bodies in the world, but because I was attractive, I was an even greater liability. My body was a powder keg that could go off at any minute, and the one who would be hurt most by the explosion would be me.

It went on from there. A high school friend recently reminded me of the time I dressed up as Dolly Parton for Halloween in the 9th grade - I wore cowboy boots, a jean skirt, and two pairs of balled-up pajama pants down my shirt to create an homage to Dolly's impressive décolletage. It seemed that even the abstract concept of breasts was too risqué, and I was apprehended immediately, shamed, and ordered to change clothes. (Three years later, my boyfriend at the time wore an Aladdin costume, completely shirtless with just the purple vest. No teacher said anything to him.) I got demerits for wearing the skirts my mother had bought me during the daytime even as I was directed to dance onstage in lingerie in the school plays at night. The drama teacher was widely accepted by faculty and students to be a "dirty old man." That was just the way it was; it didn't occur to anyone to ask whether that was right or wrong.

Using all these experiences and more as inspiration, it occurred to me how societally, women are oppressed by the standards of dress they are expected to abide by. Women's bodies are sexualized constantly, even though I would venture to say most women spend the

vast majority of their time engaging their bodies in nonsexual activities. Women are then told either to cover up or to bare their bodies at the whims of men; regardless of the gender of the people perpetuating these societal messages, the benefit of a woman's dress seems to nearly always be for the man's sake. I decided to give Bewbs the Clown the absurdly impossible task of finding something appropriate to wear that would please everyone. I created another character simply called "the Man," who guides and instructs Bewbs in her search. The Man (voiced by fellow actor Taylor Robert Jones) represents all the messages that are told to women about their bodies, and most of the outrageous things the Man says in the script are real things that I have heard in real life.

In developing the character of Bewbs the Clown, it became clear to me that although she was being played by a svelte 30-year-old woman (me), mentally, she was a child. I decided to make her 8-years-old, around the age I was when I became aware that I was being sexualized but didn't yet have any tools to really comprehend it. At first, I thought Bewbs would have no voice at all, indicating her powerlessness in society, but after a while, it became clear to me that she may exclaim in childlike wonder at particularly heightened moments. As an actor, the two things I am most often asked to do in productions is to show my body and to sing. I've always resented that a little, so I decided to reclaim both my body and my voice in the creation of Bewbs. I decided that Bewbs could sing opera, and I went back to my classical voice training from my bachelor's degree at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music to find the best pieces that might fit the narrative I created. How poignant, I thought, that Bewbs can't speak in English about the mundane, but she can sing in Italian, French, and German about the fantastic? (Also, I found it hilarious. The only thing more absurd than a topless feminist clown is a topless *opera-singing* feminist clown.) In *The Amazing Adventure of Bewbs the Clown*, Bewbs

sings three songs: *Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn* (music by Johannes Brahms, words by Klaus Groth), *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle* from the opera *Carmen* (music by Georges Bizet, words by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy) and a third song with Italian words and music of my own composition.

Performing *The Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown* has been one of the most significant experiences of my artistic life. I tend to create pieces and roles that are challenging for me, and I often curse myself during sticky parts of rehearsal, but in *Bewbs* I was able to really utilize the training I have received from the UW School of Drama over the past three years. In *Bewbs*, I created a role that was open, vulnerable, and completely present, which made it impossible for me to fall back on any old acting habits of being showy or flashy in order to mask my discomfort. In creating the physical action, I was able to isolate each part and work with specificity. I've never felt more free in my body and movements onstage, which is a particular thing I came to graduate school in order to hone. All that being said, the most meaningful thing I felt about performing *The Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown* was what I shared with members of the audience. Each night after performing, I encountered women who were crying or close to tears, thanking me because this had been their experience, too. On the final night of performances, as I was singing "il mio corpo è mio" (my body is mine), it suddenly occurred to me that for the first time in my life, I actually believed it. I began to tear up, but needed to finish the show, so I did the ridiculous goofy naked dance that I had scripted for myself even as I was having a profound emotional moment, then promptly ran back to the dressing room and sobbed. If nothing else, this my hope for *Bewbs the Clown*: that she may help heal the world, one breast at a time.

SCRIPT

Announcer:

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Amazing Adventures of Bewbs the Clown. Please be advised: the following program contains a Woman with a Body. Those who are easily triggered by Women with Bodies are advised to proceed with caution and to locate the emergency exit nearest to you. Please also note that while the Woman may possibly at times show said Body, she is not necessarily “asking for It,” unless she directly addresses you and says, “hello, may I please have It?” However, the chances of this occurring are outrageously nonexistent. I mean, in your dreams, amirite? *(Boisterous fake laughter)*...huh-huh. And now, without further ado, introducing...BEWBS.

(The house lights fade to black, as strobe and colored club lights come on to DJ Funk’s “Ass and Them Titties.”)

Music:

Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass
Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties
Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass
Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties
Ass Titties Ass Titties Ass Titties Ass Titties
Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties Titties!

(As the music ends, a woman with pink hair enters backwards onstage with her back to us, on the final beat, she turns around, revealing that she is wearing a sparkly rainbow leotard with holes cut out on the chest, exposing her breasts with heart pasties over her nipples. It’s Bewbs. She notices the audience, is a little shy, but waves in a friendly way, and comes up uncomfortably close to people sitting in the first row. She’s not aware that there’s anything odd about having her boobs hanging out.)

Bewbs notices the box sitting centerstage, and looks to the audience as if to say, “should I open this?” She tiptoes over, opens the lid carefully, and delightedly brings out a can of silly string, and again sings a celebratory high note. She opens the cap tries the top button - it sprays! Astonishment. Bewbs is embarrassed and tries to put it back as if nothing happened. She looks again and brings out a Stormtrooper action figure and sings a celebratory high note. She treats the Stormtrooper like a baby, and breastfeeds it. Finally, she looks and finds the best thing of all - a bubble machine! She sings a series of celebratory high notes as she discovers how it works, and once she’s figured it out, sings a Snow White-eque trill to express her excitement, which obviously naturally leads her to burst out into some Brahms lieder.)

BEWBS:

(English Translation by Emily Ezust)

*Wie Melodien zieht es
Mir leise durch den Sinn,
Wie Frühlingsblumen blüht es,
Und schwebt wie Duft dahin.*

*It moves like a melody
Gently through my mind
It blossoms like spring flowers
And wafts away like fragrance*

*Doch kommt das Wort und faßt es
Und führt es vor das Aug',
Wie Nebelgrau erblaßt es
Und schwindet wie ein Hauch.*

*But when it is captured in words
And placed before my eyes
It turns pale like a gray mist
And disappears like a breath*

*Und dennoch ruht im Reime
Verborgen wohl ein Duft,
Den mild aus stillem Keime
Ein feuchtes Auge ruft.*

*And yet, remaining in my rhymes
There still hides a fragrance
Which mildly from the quiet bud
My moist eyes call forth*

THE MAN (v.o):

(Sing-songy, like a ghost) Bewwwwwwwbbs

(Bewbs makes no sign of noticing)

(more insistent) Beeeewwwwwwwbbs

(Bewbs continues to play with the bubbles, undistracted)

(Harshly) BEWBS!

(Bewbs startles, locates THE MAN somewhere up above the last row, and waves delightedly)

Young lady, we seem to have a bit of a problem here.

(Bewbs cocks her head, curious)

I'm sure you know what I'm going to say to you.

(Bewbs shakes her head no)

It's about what you're wearing.

(Bewbs looks down at herself, then back up, as if to say, "what about it?")

It's well, it's not appropriate.

(Bewbs looks down again as if to located something inappropriate about her attire, then looks back up as if to say, "why not?"

It's, well...your body. It's showing.

(Bewbs expresses her utter confusion)

It's-...it's your Boobs, Bewbs! I can see your Boobs!

(Bewbs looks down, and then up as if to say, "ohhhh now I get it!" She smiles and starts poking her breasts from the underside to make them jiggle and flop around in a comical way.)

Ahem. Yes. Those. Bewbs. BEWBS! Stop that! Stop that right now. You should be utterly ashamed of yourself!

(Bewbs stops her poking, taken aback, moves as if to say "why?")

Because! *(exasperated sigh)* You women. *(as if explaining to a small child)* You have to understand that when your body is exposed, and your skin, and your hair, and your ankles and your armpits *(the Man starts to get worked up. He has to contain himself)*. It is distracting to the men. It draws them away from the very important work of building things and putting bread on the table. You don't want to destroy everything and make everyone starve to death, do you?

(Bewbs is taken aback. She shakes her head "no.")

And it's not good for the women, either. There are two types of women out there, you know: Good Girls and Bad Girls. You don't want to be a Bad Girl, do you?

(Bewbs shakes her head "no.")

Good. Because all the men in the audience have semis, and I heard those two ladies in the second row say that you look like a whore.

(Bewbs looks at the two women in question, aghast and then apologetically.)

Don't worry, we can fix this! I have a mission for you.

(Bewbs stands at attention and looks at The Man)

Bewbs...find something to wear!

(Bewbs salutes, then smiles at the challenge. Silly circus music comes on as Bewbs does a few silly tricks, maybe a cartwheel or something, and looks in the box. She comes out with a birthday party hat and puts it on her head, triumphantly.)

No no no, Bewbs! Something to wear that covers up your Boobs!

(Bewbs hits her head like "oh duhhh." She takes the party hat off her head and covers her left breast with it. She becomes aware that her other breast is still exposed, so she covers her right breast. She switches back and forth, then eventually tries to squeeze both breasts into the hat. She is successful for several seconds, until gravity gives way and the hat falls to the ground.)

I don't think that will cut it. How about a nice, demure dress?

(With renewed gusto, Bewbs salutes again to the Man. The silly circus music resumes, she does some more goofy physical stuff, and emerges with a light blue t-shirt dress. She puts it on, and presents herself triumphantly. Unbeknownst to her, the chest is cut out of this dress as well, and her boobs are still exposed.)

No, Bewbs, no!

(Bewbs crumples a little, then looks at the The Man, confused)

I can still see your Bewbs.

(Bewbs looks down. Astonishment!)

Find something to wear that covers up the fact that you have boobs!

(Bewbs salutes the Man, with a little more skepticism than last time but complete determination and all smiles. She does another physical action, and puts on a bodycon dress that does indeed, finally, cover her breasts.)

Hmmm...better, better! Although...I can still see your boobs.

(Bewbs deflates a little, and looks as if she's about to challenge the Man.)

I mean yes, technically they're covered up, but that dress doesn't leave a lot to the imagination. For instance, your shoulders are bare! Shoulders are the boobs of the arms, y'know.

*(Bewbs is *speechless*)*

And also, are you really pulling that dress off? All the best supermodels have 22 inch waists, so suck it in!

(Bewbs sucks in her stomach with look of constipated concentration.)

And don't forget the thigh gap! Your thighs shouldn't touch when you walk.

(Bewbs splays her legs in a funky Suzuki walk.)

And don't forget to smile, honey.

(Bewbs puts on a constipated smile, and walks around.)

Hmm. Better, but you still look like a Bad Girl. You want to be a Good Girl, don't you?

(Bewbs nods yes emphatically.)

Find something wear that covers up the fact that you have a body at all.

(Bewbs has a moment of WTF, then recovers, fake smiles and salutes the Man, and does some more stylized clown stuff. She puts on a man's shirt and pants, and triumphantly presents herself - surely she's done it, now!)

Oh, GOD what are you wearing?

(Bewbs looks as if to say, what now?)

Those are clothes for Boys, not for Girls! Girls are Girls and Boys are Boys, and Girls should wear Girls clothes, and Boys should wear Boys clothes! Or else the very fabric of our society will begin to unravel! You don't want people to think you're a lesbian, do you?

(Bewbs shrugs, she really doesn't care if people think she's a lesbian)

You little piece of trash. Here's a new mission: find something to wear that makes it look like you don't have a body at all. Something fitting for the garbage that you are.

(Bewbs is hurt, but salutes the Man, and begins doing some really unenthused circus moves, and puts on two black garbage bags that have holes cut out for her waist, arms, and head.)

Better. Much much better. But you're still pretty fuckable. Can't you make your face look like you're not asking for It?

(Bewbs makes some really grotesque faces.)

Hmmm. Close. Now you're like a Three-Beer girl. *(sighs like martyr.)* This was all in vain. I tried, I really did, but you can't make a Bad Girl into a Good Girl, and you, Bewbs...you are a Bad Girl.

(Bewbs shakes her head no.)

Yes, yes you are. You're a Bad, Bad Girl. And there's only one thing to do when you're a Bad Girl. Take it All Off.

(Bewbs reacts, then shakes her head no, refuses.)

Come on Bewbs! Those men that do very important things like build buildings and put bread on tables, they deserve a little fun, too! What would be the point of having a body like that if you didn't show it off! You're worthless on your own. Your only value comes from what you can give to men. This is all you have to give, so...TAKE IT OFF.

(A single red rose falls from the sky, as the opening strains of the Habanera from Bizet's Carmen begin to play. Bewbs looks at the rose dejectedly and begins to sing.)

BEWBS:

(English Translation by Athena Opera)

*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle,
S'il lui convient de refuser*

*Love is a rebellious bird
That no one can tame
And if you call for it, it'll be quite in vain
For it's in its nature to refuse*

(Bewbs picks up the rose.)

*Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière,
L'un parle bien, l'autre se tait;
Et c'est l'autre que je préfère
Il n'a rien dit; mais il me plaît.*

*Nothing helps, neither threat nor prayer
One talks well, the other rests silent
And it's the other that I prefer
Doesn't say a thing, but pleases me*

(Simultaneously: Bewbs sings, the Man speaks, and Bewbs begins movement as if outside forces are trying to force her to take off her clothes.)

L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!

Love! Love! Love! Love!

THE MAN:

Come on honey, just take it off. You know deep down you want it. Take it off. Take it off!

(Bewbs reaches into the box and grabs a pair of scissors)

BEWBS:

*L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
Il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*Love is a gypsy's child
It has never, never known what law is
If you do not love me, I love you
If I love you, then beware!*

(On the three big notes, Bewbs stabs the trash bags from the inside, piercing holes in them)

*Si tu ne m'aime pas,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime!
Mais, si je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*If you do not love me
If you do not love me, I love you!
But if love you
If I love you, then beware!*

THE MAN:

That's right, honey, take it all off. You don't belong to yourself, Bewbs. You belong to the world, and the world belongs to men. So take it all off.

(Bewbs slashes through her trash bag clothes until she is in her original jumpsuit.)

BEWBS:

*Si tu ne m'aime pas,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime!
Mais, si je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*If you do not love me
If you do not love me, I love you!
But if I love you
If I love you, then beware!*

(Bewbs stands exhausted.)

No no no, ALL OF IT. Take it ALL off.

(In the following, Bewbs does interpretive movement, as if struggling physically against an outside force.)

*L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
Battit de l'aile et s'envola;
L'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre;
Tu ne l'attend plus, il est là!*

*The bird you thought you caught by surprise
Beats its wings and flies away
Love lies afar, you can wait for it
And when you don't expect it, there it is!*

*Tout autour de toi vite, vite,
Il vient, s'en va, puis il revient!
Tu crois le tenir, il t'évite;
Tu crois l'éviter, il te tient!*

*All around you twirls faster, faster
It comes and goes, and then comes back
You think you caught it, it eludes you
You think you've escaped it, it captures you*

THE MAN:

This will all be a lot easier if you just relax. That's it, you asked for it.

L'amour, l'amour, l'amour, l'amour!

Love! Love! Love! Love!

(In this next section, Bewbs has her hands tied behind her back, and is thrown by the invisible outside forces over the box as if she is being assaulted from behind)

*L'amour est enfant de Bohême,
Il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*Love is a gypsy's child
It has never, never known what law is
If you do not love me, I love you
If I love you, then beware!*

(On the three big notes, she rocks forward, as if being penetrated by three thrusts)

*Si tu ne m'aime pas,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime!
Mais, si je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*If you do not love me
If you do not love me, I love you!
But if I love you
If I love you, then beware!*

THE MAN:

This is the way things are, young lady. I hope you learned your lesson. Now I'm not going to tell you again: TAKE IT OFF.

(Bewbs recovers somewhat from her shock, and begins searching the box.)

What- what are you doing?

BEWBS:

*Si tu ne m'aime pas,
Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime!*

*If you do not love me
If you do not love me, I love you!*

(Bewbs takes out a SuperSoaker/Clown Bazooka and points it toward The Man)

THE MAN:

What are you doing?!?

BEWBS:

*Mais, si je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!*

*But if I love you
If I love you, then beware!*

(As Bewbs sings her high note, the Man makes an operatic scream of fear that is played simultaneously. Bewbs fires. There's a big explosion sound and the lights go red, then dark, then come up again. From the sky falls an exploded MAGA hat. Bewbs picks it up, looks at it, then throws it again on the floor and stomps on it.)

BEWBS:

*Ass ass ass ass ass
Titties
Ass Ass and titties titties titties
Ass Ass and titties*

*Il mio corpo è mio
Il mio corpo è mio
Il mio corpo è mio
È mio, è mio!*

*My body is mine
My body is mine
My body is mine
It's mine, it's mine!*

(DJ Funk's "Ass and Them Titties" comes back on. Bewbs throws all props that are out back in the box, turns to the back, and takes off her jumpsuit, now wearing nothing but a pink thong and her pasties. On her back are written the words "Not Yours." When she turns around, on her stomach are written the words MINE. Bewbs performs an exuberant, triumphant, Napoleon Dynamite-esque dance. Although she is nearly naked, her movements are more nerdy than sexual. She takes out the bubble blower toward the end, blows it at the audience.)

LIGHTS DOWN